

17th May 2016

To: California State Board of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Revision of South Asian History in California Textbooks

I support the recommendations of the California History-Social Science Project (CHSSP), including its acceptance of edits suggested by the South Asia Faculty Group, relating to proposed revisions of the California History-Social Science Framework (CHSSF). The CHSSP has made genuine efforts to adhere to a scientific and fact-based rendering of world history in California K-12 classrooms.

In particular, the revisions to California history textbooks proposed by the Hindu Education Foundation, the Uberoi Foundation, and a number of individuals in the representations of South Asia in world history are narrowly motivated by the singular desire to incorrectly elevate ancient Hindu civilization to be of equal precedence with respect to those of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and to exaggerate its virtues while obscuring its social injustices.

The proposed revisions seek to displace Indus Valley civilization (Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, now entirely in Pakistan) with a Sindh-Saraswati civilization along the "lost" Saraswati River (in present-day India and Pakistan), which involves stretching geography and inverting the relative historical significance of these ancient archaeological sites.

The proposed revisions further attempt to whitewash the historical role of Hindu traditions, social practices, and institutions in developing and reinforcing caste hierarchy and gender inequality by obliterating the association of caste with Hinduism or by denying the very existence of caste. The set of traditions associated with any ancient religion or culture contain practices that would not be acceptable in today's society, but that never justifies erasing such practices from the historical record or from our consciousness, for how then can we learn the lessons of history?

Finally, in response to claims by some Indian Americans that references to South Asia erase their identities as Indians, those references to South Asia specifically refer to areas that may include present-day Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, or Maldives. Other references are specific to present-day India. While British India once included all of South Asia (minus Sri Lanka and Afghanistan which were under separate colonial administrations), the India of today is not all of South Asia. Thus, there are different contexts where "India" versus "South Asia" are applicable. No identity is to be erased, and all national identities must be recognized.

These proposed revisions are ahistorical and geographically inaccurate, and have been rightly countered by the South Asia Faculty Group and rightly rejected by the CHSSP.

I am a writer on Indian and South Asian history and political economy who has written significant peer-reviewed articles and papers, including having been a participant in the epic debate in India on the mode of production during the 1970s and 1980s. I continue today to write and lecture on global political economy rooted in evidence-based historical contexts.

Sincerely,



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